

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE WILLIAM J. PERRY  
REMARKS AT LAND FORCES ACADEMY  
TIRANA, ALBANIA  
JULY 20, 1994

Thank you very much, Minister Zhulali. Greetings to the officers and non-commissioned officers of the Albanian armed forces.

You and I are making history. I am the first American Secretary of Defense ever to set foot on free Albanian soil. And you are the first generation in almost a century to serve and defend liberty and democracy on this soil.

Yours is a great and awesome duty with serious responsibilities. In America, we believe there are few causes more worthy than liberty and democracy. Over our history, many men and women in uniform and their families have sacrificed to defend these causes. Liberty and democracy are the foundation of America. And they are the foundation of the new Albania.

I came to Albania to bring a message on behalf of our President, Bill Clinton, and the American people. The message is that the United States strongly supports Albania's independence; We strongly support your efforts to achieve political and economic reform, and to re-shape your military to serve democracy under civilian leadership; And we're committed to helping Albania overcome the challenges that lie ahead.

I had the opportunity to share this message personally with Minister Zhulali when he came to Washington last month. Our meetings then laid the foundation for warm and cooperative relations between the two defense establishments, and our two nations.

Our nations share a tradition of cherishing democracy. In June, you celebrated the day when Fan Noli created your first democratic government in Albania more than 70 years ago. On July 4, the United States celebrates the day when our founding fathers declared our independence more than 200 years ago. At the time, one of our great patriots, Thomas Paine, declared, "We have it in our power to begin the world over again." And we did begin our world again. We built a prosperous nation dedicated to freedom, peace and stability.

Today, having achieved their independence, the people of Albania have the power to begin their world again. I believe that Albanians, too, have the power to build a prosperous nation dedicated to freedom, peace and stability.

We understand the challenges you face. The road ahead is not easy. We recognize that the Albanian people are suffering many hardships. And we understand the sacrifices that all of you here today make to serve your country.

As America's civilian defense leader, I'm dedicated to establishing close relationships with Albania's military forces and its civilian defense leadership. Our defense and military organizations are creating and deepening contacts at every level:

- from the warm relationship that Minister Zhulali and I have established,

- to the connection that the South Carolina National Guard unit from the United States has made with your military.

America's goal is to increase our mutual understanding, and provide a channel through which our military can help your military reorganize along democratic lines.

Why is the United States interested in Albania's success in military, political and economic reform? There are two major reasons.

Because we want a Europe in which no nation threatens its neighbors, there are no common enemies, and all nations respect human rights, independent states and secure borders. And we want a free, democratic Albania to take its place in this new security system.

Albania has already started down this road by joining NATO's Partnership for Peace initiative. We applaud Albania's strong commitment to the Partnership.

As the new generation of Albanian forces, you may have the opportunity to join NATO forces in such military activities as peacekeeping, sanctions(enforcement), disaster relief, and search and rescue operations. You also may find yourself planning, exercising and training with Allied forces. And your nation's leadership now has a seat at NATO military and political organizations.

In the past two years, Albania has made historic changes, and taken a lot of risks. For many of you, these changes and risks have not made your lives any easier. But remember how much Albania has achieved in just 24 months. From the depths of oppression and isolation, Albania achieved its independence, embraced democracy, and made a determined start down the road to military, economic and political reform. And by carrying the torch of liberty, Albania will ensure a bright future.

We are Albania's friend in peace, democracy and freedom. And as your friend, the United States will do what we can to help to ease Albania's hardships as you struggle to break from the past and move to seize the future.

I would like to close today with a few lines of verse that Fan Noli wrote during his exile to America by anti-democratic forces in Albania. It was a message of hope to his homeland on the brink of World War II, urging Albania to keep up the struggle to restore its freedom and democracy. At that time, he wrote, "Keep on trying mother, don't be afraid. For there are sons of yours in America."

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Albania still has sons in America. And we hope that our democracy inspires you as it did Fan Noli.

Thank you very much.

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